

Assembly Member Rivera Legislative Program Ideas

Methodology: The below ideas for inclusion came from three sources: 1) Alaska Municipal League Housing Working Group documents, 2) Complex Behavioral Health Needs Community Task Force Final Report, 3) Constituent Communications.

Housing:

1. Request: The Governor and Legislature should encourage relevant state agencies to more actively use its bonding and loaning ability to encourage additional housing development.
 - a. Background: Historically, the state has played a large role in helping to spur housing development. In 1972, the state provided a 36-year loan which resulted in 98 rental units being created in downtown Juneau. In 1975, the Senior Housing Development Program was created within AHFC which has helped to create a thousand units of senior housing. The state could play a larger role in helping to spur economic development throughout Alaska by leveraging its ability to provide long-term loans and other financing when private financing is not available.
2. Request: The Legislature should create a Special Legislative Committee on Housing to provide a venue to address state level solutions to housing.
 - a. Background: The last time a task force or other group convened on housing was in 2016. There currently exists no forum for the Legislature to discuss state level housing policy. There are a variety of policy levers which could be discussed within this committee if created, including state financing of housing, transfer of lands to municipal governments, and more.
3. Request: The Governor and Legislature should encourage relevant state agencies to create a state infrastructure revolving fund.
 - a. Background: Infrastructure needs, especially the need to build new roads and provide utilities, can be the death knell for new development. A model already exists within state government to provide infrastructure needs through the Department of Environmental Conservation's revolving loan funds. A similar model could be replicated by the state to create an infrastructure revolving fund to assist urban and rural Alaskan communities to meet these oftentimes prohibitively expensive needs.
4. Request: Robust funding should be included in the FY25 budget for the Alaska Housing Trust.
 - a. Background: Until 2022, Alaska was one of a handful of states which did not have a statewide housing trust to focus on increasing the stock of attainable housing. There is a common consensus among elected officials, the business community, non-profits, and other stakeholders that Alaska is facing a housing crisis. Providing robust funding for the Alaska Housing Trust is one simple way the state can be a partner to help meet our housing needs across the state.

Behavioral Health:

1. Request: The Alaska Department of Health should consider issues regarding Medicaid 1115 waiver billing as it goes through the renewal process.
 - a. Background: Barriers to allowing behavioral health providers to bill to Medicaid through the 1115 waiver for their services related to people experiencing homelessness has artificially limited the number of providers who can deliver this essential service.

2. Request: The Alaska Department of Health should review regulations and processes to allow for easier enrollment and access to services in Medicaid, Social Security, and SSI for people experiencing homelessness.
 - a. Background: Currently, there are significant barriers to assisting people experiencing homelessness in enrolling in and accessing public benefits which could support them on their journey to housing stability. For example, to access Medicaid services, an individual would need to be enrolled, have an assessment and a formal treatment plan. This is sometimes untenable for individual experiencing homelessness who have co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues who would greatly benefit from these services.
3. Request: The Governor and Legislature should consider changes to state labor laws to allow behavioral health staff to work 12-hour shifts.
 - a. Background: Currently, behavioral health providers face significant workforce shortages, like many industries across Alaska. Nurses are able to work 12-hour shifts but other behavioral health staff are unable to do so due to state labor laws. Behavioral health workers have requested this change in state law to assist them in better providing their services to the community.

Homelessness:

1. Request: The Governor should consider giving ownership of Alaska's Plan to End Long Term Homelessness to the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness. If not supported, the Governor should reconvene the Alaska Council on the Homeless to update the plan.
 - a. Background: The counterpart to the Anchored Home Plan, the plan to end homelessness within the Anchorage Continuum of Care formally adopted by the Municipality of Anchorage, is Alaska's Plan to End Long Term Homelessness. This plan, created in 2009, was a ten-year plan which ended in 2019. Ownership of this plan currently lies within the Alaska Council on the Homeless, whose members are appointed by the Governor. The last progress report completed by the council was in 2018. To create a parallel system, it may be of benefit to consider handing over ownership of the plan, updating of the plan, and progress reports on the plan, to the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness. As a point of comparison, the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness is responsible for the Anchored Home Plan. If not supported by the state, at a minimum, the Governor should task the Alaska Council on the Homeless, which has only met seven times since 2018, to update the plan.
2. Request: Robust funding should be included in the FY25 budget to assist with operational costs of congregate and non-congregate shelter throughout the state. At a minimum, current funding should not be reduced.
 - a. Background: Local communities throughout the state are actively addressing the need for additional shelter space, including Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Anchorage, and others. Statewide support for shelter operations is necessary to ensure that these facilities have sustainable and reliable funding.